

Washington, DC – Congressman Mike Honda (D-CA), Chair of the Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus (CAPAC), today met with Senate Minority Leader Harry Reid (D-NV) and other Senate leaders to identify challenges faced by immigrant communities in the Gulf Coast after Hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

Honda traveled to the Gulf Coast two weeks ago to assess the situation first-hand and meet with members of the Asian and Pacific Islander American (APIA) community who are struggling to access disaster relief services. Among the challenges facing the APIA and other immigrant communities are language access and cultural competency.

Congressman Honda and Senator Reid, joined by Democratic U.S. Senators Edward Kennedy (MA), Dick Durbin (IL), and Barbra Boxer (CA), is teaming up with immigrant advocates to address the needs of those who were affected by Katrina. This effort includes applying for relief services without fear of deportation and receiving appropriate language and cultural assistance in accessing necessary resources.

The Congressional Democrats met with representatives of the Gulf Coast immigrant community in an hour-long session followed by a press conference. The members discussed challenges with activists, evacuees, and representatives of both the APIA and Hispanic communities who traveled to the capital for this meeting.

“The federal government must ensure appropriate assistance for specific constituencies, particularly those facing linguistic and cultural barriers,” Honda said “I will be introducing legislation to provide cultural and linguistic training and assistance to our disaster relief community, and will continue working with my colleagues to improve immigrant communities’ access to services.”

“I am absolutely outraged about some of the things I have heard,” said Senator Reid. “Reports that local police and the U.S. Marshals have raided Red Cross shelters and asked for immigration documents from anybody who looked Latino and accounts that the Bush administration has placed individuals seeking emergency aid in deportation proceedings. This is another reason we need comprehensive immigration reform, so that no one will have to suffer such questioning in the case of an emergency.”

“Government social service agencies across the board must work with community-based, linguistically competent organizations to build the trans-cultural bridge to meet the long-term needs of the Vietnamese and other minority evacuees,” said Tram Nguyen, Katrina Relief Manager for Boat People SOS. “The ad- hoc coalition of service providers in Houston has worked tirelessly to meet their immediate needs. We must extend this spirit of collaboration to Washington and in local and state government to address the social injustices the Vietnamese community has faced. Only by sharing our resources can we ensure these evacuees a dignified recovery and rebuilding.”

“The Asian Pacific Islander and Hispanic immigrant communities have been an integral and growing part of the larger Gulf coast community for some time,” Honda said. “Like individuals up and down the Gulf Coast, these communities have experienced tremendous loss in the wake of Hurricane Katrina and Rita, and require adequate help from the federal government.”